

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 8-9, 2018, Cycle B**

In our Gospel passage from Mark for this weekend, we witness Jesus healing a man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. After performing some -- what we would consider strange ritual actions -- putting his fingers in the man's ears, spitting and touching his tongue, and groaning -- Jesus heals the man using the Aramaic word "Ephphatha" meaning "be opened." We are told: immediately the man's ears were opened -- he could now hear -- and his speech impediment removed -- he could speak plainly.

Where have we heard that word "Ephphatha"? It is used in the Church's Baptismal Liturgy, and I always try to draw attention to the "Ephphatha" ritual whenever we celebrate Baptism during a Sunday Mass. After the child is Baptized, anointed with the Oil of Chrism, clothed with a new white garment, and given his/her own miniature Easter candle, the celebrant prays the "Ephphatha" prayer over the newly Baptized before sending him/her on their way to live their new Christian life -- touching their lips and ears!

The priest prays:

"The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith to the praise and glory of the God the Father. Amen."

What Jesus did for the deaf man who could not speak, Jesus does for all of us when we are Baptized. He commands our ears be opened to hearing and receiving the Word of God, and he loosens our tongue to speak and live clearly God's word in the world.

The Gospel writer of Mark is saying that Jesus did more than just heal the man physically. He healed him from that inner deafness that prevented him from truly hearing the Word of God, and loosed his tongue to proclaim and live the Word of God.

Maybe this message of healing inner deafness is just the message we followers of Jesus need to hear today, especially those in ordained authority. With all the reports of sexual, physical, and mental abuse in church coming forward, just maybe Jesus is reaching out to heal our deafness to the cries of the abused, suffering, to really hear the Gospel, and to strive to bring healing and wholeness into the lives of those who suffer.